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THE DIGITAL ART EXHIBITION "THE OTHER LANDSCAPES"; HOW TO EXPAND AND REMIX DETAILS OF NATURE?

PHILOFICTION LANDSCAPES, MUSIC, NATURE, REALISM, ULTRABLACK

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This is the descriptive text seeking to theorize *The Other Landscapes*, a multi-faceted digital art exhibition at *Expression* art gallery bringing together works by four artists as well as a theoretical text by a philosopher. There is also a sound installation that I created at the *Daniel A. Séguin Botanical Garden*.

The mission is to present reflections that manifest various issues of contemporary art related to the question: "How to expand and remix details of nature?". The theme of this exhibition is defined by sensitivity to natural landscapes and to their documentation. The works will put you in situations where humans are not at the center of the universe. They are part of an archipelago, a canvas, a cosmos. They are a floating element. They are part of a whole. The works take the form of interstices (thin spaces) between humans and landscapes point of views. The result is an imaginary space and an alternative landscapist reality that constitute the utopia of a mixed and unreal nature. These works propose an uncontrollable living together between the sublime and the chaos; they aim to slow down time, to offer a moment of naturalistic reflection. Here, the darkness is not nihilistic regarding the future impacts of climate changes. It is rather a form of cosmos filled with infinite nuances, critiques, potential situations and changes.

The process of selecting the artists and works of this exhibition is the following: As a curator artist, I theorize the works, but I also produce a work. My sound installation is presented in nature. This dual role allows me to reflect on the works of the artists presented as well as to create and experiment in art. There is a sharing between all of us, and we have mutually influenced each other throughout the preparation of this exhibition, much like a research-creation. I have selected artists with whom I have collaborated for several years in the context of my art creation projects, whether for the production of electronic music albums, art videos, concert performances, or correspondences. This collaborative context means that I have observed their production for some time and have noticed links and similarities that unite them in connection with the creation of semi- abstract digital visual and sound landscapes.

I will take a brief pause here to define the term semi-abstract; The term semi-abstract can be defined as a thin space between concrete and abstract art (halfway between the two). It is both devoid of referents and revealing the representation of subjects and objects (That is to say, it is devoid of referents related to what we can recognize, but on the other hand, it will represent the subjects and objects that surround us). The combination of these two elements creates a synthesis where different layers of materials create a new substance. The synthesis, due to the mixing of layers of materials, generates another substance, through continuous remixing and postproduction by the artists. In summary, to rephrase it, imagine that in what you see and hear in the works of this exhibition, there is simultaneously the mixture of existing landscapes and also abstractions. It's noise then.

These creation processes (remixing and postproduction) are directly linked to the fact that current human interactions leave traces and imprints. Very few things are at 0 or nil (action = pollution). Pollution comes from the Latin *pollutio*, "soiling". The works here reverse this negative materialism into a positive materialism. In relation to this idea; for the art theorist and critic Nicolas Bourriaud, capitalism tends toward dematerialization, through the digitalization of all relationships, whether through monetary transactions or social interactions¹ (For example, monetary transactions and social interactions are becoming increasingly immaterial and virtual because of the digital dimension). Contemporary art can react to this by creating a positive materialism by making the inaudible audible and making the invisible visible². More concretely, this idea can be explained by the deep, even microscopic analysis (similar to the behavior of capitalist digital relationships) of organisms and landscapes. What does it do if

the work disassembles nature in a microscopic and deep way similar to the encompassing capitalist system? I think the audience is in front of a work with great natural value and richness, and the exhibition *The Other Landscapes* aims to sensitize the public to this infinity that resides in nature.

Before describing the exhibition's path, I will share three themes that can serve as avenues of reflections and observations:

1- The title of the exhibition is *The Other Landscapes*. The term "other" is important here. The word "other" in Latin is "alter". There is a form of artistic modernism called altermodernism. It is therefore an "other modernism". In another modernism, another current era, several spaces would exist. In short, it is the acceptance of non-exclusivity and anti-doctrine. We are for plurality. Altermodernism would be another modernity different from avant-garde modernism and post-modernism, which have linear tendencies and intentions to surpass the past. It is therefore different from the linear time where the current surpasses the past. More precisely, altermodernism is a new paradigm of the 21st century with alternative ways of motivating artists to be more radical in art by traveling between concrete and digital worlds, breaking down borders and creating other temporal spaces. The works of this exhibition apply the term "alter" to how we (humans) live in landscapes.

2- The second concept is the sound landscape. "Soundscape" in English and derived from "landscape". The Canadian composer, theorist, and educator Raymond Murray Schaffer published in 1977 *The Soundscape. The Tuning of the World*³, a work of acoustic ecology and the first theorization of the landscape as a sound architecture. Based on the concept of the visual landscape, he defines the notion of the soundscape and therefore creates the anglophone neologism soundscape stemming from landscape. Schaffer's primary objective was to document different soundscapes in familiar places. Despite this very broad mandate, Schaffer's work is oriented by a quest for harmony that he defines as the possibility of "hearing the sound of silence in modern society"⁴.

3- The third subject is the *Mille Plateaux* record label. Most of the artists in this exhibition publish on this influential German record label that focuses on post-techno electronic music since the early 1990s in the form of albums as well as theoretical and philosophical essays. Their most recent theorization is on a subject they call the *ultrablack of music*. They start from the idea that the color black is opaque, while the ultrablack is an opaque color filled with nuances. It is the attention to details and the infinitely small. It is the microscopic in disturbance. This color is synonymous with non-representation. Instead of representing things in art, we are in nothing.

Returning to the creation of this exhibition. I have documented the exchanges and research with the artists and philosophers for several years in the context of our collaborations, but also in the context of my artistic practice under the pseudonym of Automatisme. These texts are the hooks to this exhibition and so in 2019, I wrote a first preliminary text. Then, I shared with the artists an essay theorizing the concept of *The Other Landscapes* right at the beginning of our exchanges on this exhibition. I also asked the artists to create a new original work specifically for this event based on the theme. My objective was for the presentation text of this exhibition and their works to evolve and change until the presentation in the gallery in

2023, similar to the aforementioned research-creation. They also had carte blanche. I felt that their production was mature enough with respect to the theme to be able to present something that would push their limits while staying within their strengths and experiences.

I chose the format of the work according to their specialty and what I had observed as being the most accomplished in their production. The layout of the room is also made according to its dimensions and its architectural qualities.

The arrangement of the works takes the following form; For the first work at the entrance, Marilou Lyonnais Archambault spoke to me about her interest in sculpture, but in the digital dimension. As if the more classic bas-reliefs carved in material were now a hybrid of digital projection on forms in a structure. The projected images are as sculptural as they are topography. That is, the artist previously created a bas-relief in the studio on which she projected images and then filmed and edited the result. This process is also repeated in the room, which echoes remixing techniques, post-production, but also recontextualization. We erected a wall at the entrance of the room specifically for this work to be possible.

Marilou Lyonnais Archambault's digital sculpture explores potential points of fusion between the digital and living universes. By projecting digital content onto angular paper sculpture forming a bas-relief, the artist presents a steep and modifiable space reflecting the personality of natural landscapes. The projection surface becomes a space halfway between virtual and real universes that currently manifest their shattered characteristics. This work questions the impact of our digital consumerism (internet, devices) on natural landscapes. Tracing the route of mineral resources used in the production of our electronic devices, the artist offers us the panorama of *Uyuni* (Bolivia), a surreal salt desert almost lunar threatened by the rush of lithium mining. In short, between dreamlike and dystopian space, Lyonnais investigates traces of our consumption on natural environments. At first glance, it seems to be a sublime landscape, but on approaching, one can observe the ecological disaster that resides there.

The shape of the *Uyuni* paper is a fragile surface, mimicking mountains and valleys. It is a sensitive material with a memory. That is, the traces and folds on a paper are irrevocable. Paper as a material is a modifiable, tangible, hyper-material space, steeped in our everyday lives and our history. The evolution of paper is intimately linked to the history of humans and that of the digital. Paper is a medium of great technology and a symbol of evolution (as a means of mass communication). When humans were capable of producing and distributing the paper and the stories in prominent quantities, the course of the history of information changed. According to Lyonnais Archambault, it is one of the first screen-surfaces, and there is a parallel to draw between this mass consumer product and that of our electronic devices. These are two antagonists: paper versus digital, and we are replacing one with the other.

For the second work, Thomas Köner spoke to me about the idea of a dance floor outside of clubs, bars, and festivals in reaction to the pandemic and the lockdowns of the early 2020s. He dreamt of a techno music in which the sounds were unrecognizable, practically from a distant cosmos and in a format other than the standard stereo of the music we listen to daily. We therefore arranged his work in the large gallery room and projected the composition in an immersive and complex multi-channel format.

Ultrablack 4.1 by Thomas Köner is a sound installation with six speakers where different percussions are assigned to each of the speakers. It encapsulates the current of Ultrablack of Music from Mille Plateaux. Multidirectional, it aims for non-representation and abstraction of sounds related to techno music. Even if its frequencies are immeasurable and cannot be counted, we feel them: they vibrate within us. This installation is freed from tonal superstructure; it no longer belongs to music, thus deviating from dominant trends in electronic music. It is a multidimensional "dance music" of the future. Inside a black square, the arrangement of the speakers refers to the work of the *Vitruvian Man*. This sensory experience invites us to plunge into the cosmos and criticizes the idea that humans are at the center of the universe. This work from the Renaissance by the famous artist Leonardo Da Vinci around 1492 is a symbol of humanism, of man at the center of the universe and of its perfect proportions. This influences the idea of a perfect positioning of the speakers in this Köner's work. This sound installation explains the phenomenon of hearing by the use of phenomenology. The entire body is essential for hearing beyond the auditory channels. Becoming aware of hearing is possible with the entire body. Köner's work is not about space or creating the illusion of space through sound spatialization. It is close to the body and the skin. It is very close to the gallery space surface as we move close to the wall, which forms the skin of the room. It therefore solicits the five senses and positions them in such a way that the cosmos is constituted.

Here is the description provided by the artist: "The sound of the Ultrablack is difficult to hear. It is formless and without 'sustain.' Yet it appears under everyone's ears to annihilate stupidity. It has neither its own self nor anything that belongs to the self. Its frequency range is silent and empty. The Ultrablack sound box is clear and pure. It knows its own purity of contamination. The Ultrablack sampling frequencies and bit depths are immeasurable and cannot be counted. But they appear due to their reflection in unlimited worlds. It is not imprisoned by subjective or objective elements. It has liberated itself from the horror of the bass and the tonal superstructure. It no longer belongs to music. It no longer obeys music. It does not hear about music. It is not a subject of musical ideology. That is how it listens to Ultrablack. It has detached itself from being inside of the sound-language. It has been silent and void from the beginning. All errors have fallen. It thus records the echoes of Ultrablack. Liberated from vowels and consonants, it destroys reality as a reliance on them. It listens in the ten directions and is transitory in ten thousand million quadraphonic sound installations. The numerous frequencies of its resonances oscillate on the thousand plates of the thousand great worlds and darken the ten thousand all-pass filters. It is the same in all ten directions. Everything goes through these all-pass filters and clearly resounds in Ultrablack 4.1."

For the third work in the back room, Stefan Paulus spoke to me about his passion for mixing several images into each other and how their superimposition creates new places, objects, and subjects. We have therefore installed two projectors showing series of images on two facing walls. The diffused beams cross each other like an X, which tinges what the viewers perceive. It is therefore disposed in a situation where the viewer circulates within a multi-exhibition of images and furthermore the images we see are also multi-expositions made by the artist. It is not a flat canvas, but a space, a three-dimensional place. It is almost impossible to look at the two walls at the same time. The viewer is therefore in a situation of floating, like his space in the universe.

Transversal Connections and Non-Becoming by Stefan Paulus is a series of photographic superpositions. It merges objects in the manner of *philo-fictions* or *photo-fictions*, inviting the public to invent their own theoretical operations and rules, as well as to tame a chaotic universe made of multiple representations. Thus are questioned the possibilities of imagining and experiencing the landscapes that surround us. His production technique is the taking of photographs by 35mm slide films used several times over several years, which he then digitizes.

Paulus goes against photorealism, where representations of the world are created as copies of reality as is the case in passport and product photos (fashion, food, cars, etc.). These copies contribute to organizing the perception of reality and make it an incontestable fixed idea, as these images take the place of reality. Reality is perceived through a photograph and not the object, so there is the representation of an identity. Before perception occurs, the senses are already predetermined by our world view. According to Paulus, our preconceptions lead to the problem of our difficulty in perceiving changes. His multi-expositions presented in the context of this exhibition are therefore experiments of non-photorealisms through the removal of the apprehensions of forms and operating through the mixing of several places in his images.

For the fourth work, Myriam Boucher spoke to me about her fascination with the immersive perception of micro-details and the power of water and forest. We have therefore installed her video music work in an isolated and closed room. The place is equipped with headphones to get the sound as close as possible to the viewer. The work is inspired by the night crickets and is therefore in a completely dark room.

The work *The Tuning of the Fields* by Myriam Boucher is a video-music work taken from a performance audiovisual of the same title. It works on the real-time combination of images and music. Between video art and electroacoustics. It is not necessarily through music first. In this work, the artist seeks to evoke moments of solitude and wonder: that feeling of suspended time that inhabits us when listening to the song of crickets, with closed eyes, at night, in a meadow. There is a mimetic and digital syntheses of this environment. Drawing from the artist's memories, this work is inspired by the sound landscape of her childhood experience in the Montérégie region (QC/CA).

As for my work, the sound installation presented is entitled *Ultra-Scape (Extended Version)*. It is a dense and extended sound landscape inspired by the music of the record labels *Chain Reaction* and *Echospace [Detroit]* in the genre of generative ambient dub techno electronic music. It resembles what can be heard in my practice in the form of albums, but it is transposed into another format. My artistic practice questions the globalization and saturation of the current time and space. This sound installation is a work generated from field recordings at the *Daniel A. Séguin Garden* captured during the early spring of 2023. The sound landscape of this place is peri-urban. It oscillates between the boreal forest, the school district, and the bustling city. These sounds have then been modified several times. Their characteristics and variations serve as modulators of sound production tools in the software Ableton Live, the digital audio workstation used. I have thus increased and reshaped this material in the studio, like a landscape in constant metamorphosis. This work is intended to be broadcast at the same volumes (variants and in steps) as the environment in which it is

installed and in a different season of the original recordings. Listening to this mix of two simultaneous environments is intended to be another creation in itself, which is harmonious and egalitarian between natural landscapes and human beings and thereby, the formation of another season.

Finally, *Ultrablack Landscape* by Achim Szepanski is an essay linking the theories of sound art from the Ultrablack of Music movement and landscape art. It explains that the representation of the horizon has been transformed into spatial void in this artistic practice. This text contradicts the principle that "less is more" by asserting that "less is less."

1 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Crash Test*, Montpellier, La Panacée – MoCo Montpellier Contemporain, 2018, p. 8-22.

2 Ibid.

3 Raymond Murray Schafer, *Le paysage sonore : Le monde comme musique*, Paris, Editions Wildproject, 2010 [1979], 411 p.

4 Ibid.

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